

proclamations from school boards, city mayors, Members of Congress, and state legislators and in Maine they read a proclamation from the governor.

I want to thank all of the people who worked to make GEAR UP Week a success and everyone who strives to see that college is more than a dream for our Nation's young people.

REGARDING VOTER SUPPRESSION  
SPECIAL ORDER

**HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, November 1, 2011*

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak out against voter suppression that is happening in my district and throughout states all across the country. With the presidential elections just one year away on Sunday, it is critical that we bring to light this most important issue that is disenfranchising eligible voters of select ages and backgrounds.

The right to vote is one of the fundamental pillars of any functioning democracy. In the United States, we use voting as a means for the people to select their elected officials at all levels of representation. This fact, I believe, is a basic lesson that we have all learned in civics class back in elementary school. Yet, recently I have begun to think that some of our Republican leaders in government have forgotten this simple truth—or worse, have

chosen to ignore these basic tenets of American democracy.

Under the guise that it will strengthen the integrity of our elections, a number of state legislatures have already taken extraordinary steps to exclude the elderly, our youth, minorities, and the poor from getting to the polls and casting their ballot through a series of regressive voting laws. It is no surprise that since there was an unprecedented turnout from all of these groups during the 2008 presidential election that state governments are only now mobilizing to overhaul these laws.

Nationally, these anti-voting laws are materializing in the form of stringent photo ID mandates, inflated proof of citizenship requirements, more difficult voter registration, reduced early and absentee days, and heightened barriers to reentry for citizens with past felony convictions. Seven states have already signed photo ID mandates into law, while the other provisions are already enacted or being considered by many more.

In Texas, we have already seen strict voter ID laws passed in the State Legislature this year. This law, which requires each voter to present a valid government-issued ID regardless if they possess a voter registration card and are listed among the voting roles, targets and prevents students, the elderly and the poor from exercising their right to vote. Additional restrictions on voter registration drives have also been signed into state law in order to further prevent minorities and others from registering in the first place. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, more than 26,000 voters in Texas registered to vote via registration drives in 2008 alone. That's at least an-

other 26,000 voters that we can expect to become disenfranchised this election cycle with the passage of these laws.

These kinds of devious tactics have been used far too many times before—and the problem is only getting worse. I cannot help but be reminded of the days of Jim Crow, where arbitrary literacy tests and unfounded poll taxes were implemented in order to prevent African Americans from casting their vote. These kinds of intentional barriers to democracy are why the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-fourth, and Twenty-sixth Amendments are needed. It is why the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is needed. It is why the Supreme Court has even had to intervene with a ruling on poll taxes in *Harper V. Virginia Board of Education*.

Yet here we find ourselves again battling the same problem with a different disguise. I refuse to accept that these laws seek to address existing weaknesses in our election system. In fact, these laws do nothing to address the kinds of fraud that were exposed during previous elections, such as the purging of entire voter rolls or intentionally long wait times during early voting.

Mr. Speaker, these blatant attempts to disenfranchise select groups of voters are not consistent with the democracy that most of us envision for this country. I must therefore oppose any attempts by anyone to enact and enforce these malicious and dishonest statutes. Adopting such regressive and blatantly lopsided voter mandates is a massive step in the wrong direction that serves the interests of a select few over the demands of the majority.